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2002HANOI01653 - UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ4049

PAGE 01 HANOI 01653 01 OF 02 011003Z
ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	OIGO-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OIC-02	PRS-00	P-00	SP-00	STR-00	TEST-00
	TRSE-00	USIE-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00
	SAS-00	/005W					

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6891
INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 001653

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#) [RELFREE](#) [DPOL](#) [HUMANR](#)
SUBJECT: RESEARCHING RELIGION AT THE PARTY SCHOOL

REF: HANOI 156

1. (U) SUMMARY. A SEVEN YEAR-OLD CENTER AT THE MAIN PARTY SCHOOL FOCUSES ON THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN VIETNAMESE HISTORY AND PRESENT, AND HELPS TO EDUCATE UP-AND-COMING PARTY
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 HANOI 01653 01 OF 02 011003Z
MEMBERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ABOUT THE "POSITIVE" ROLE RELIGION CAN PLAY IN VIETNAM'S DEVELOPMENT. ITS OFFICIALS HAVE PROMISED LATER THIS SUMMER TO PROVIDE DETAILED FEEDBACK ON THE VIETNAM CHAPTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) LIKE ITS COUNTERPART TO ANALYZE HUMAN RIGHTS (REFTEL), THE "CENTER FOR SCIENCE OF BELIEF AND RELIGION" ("TRUNG TAM KHOA HOC VE TIN NGUONG VA TON GIAO," SOMETIMES TRANSLATED IN OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AS THE CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES) OF THE HO CHI MINH NATIONAL POLITICAL ACADEMY DEMONSTRATES THE RECOGNITION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM (CPV) THAT IT MUST FACE SENSITIVE ISSUES HEAD ON AND MUST ALSO TRAIN ITS "BEST AND BRIGHTEST" IN HOW TO IMPLEMENT OFFICIAL POLICY. POL/C MET ON JUNE 28 WITH THE CENTER'S DIRECTOR, DR. NGUYEN DUC LU, IN THE EMBASSY'S FIRST CONTACT WITH THIS CENTER.

3. (U) ACCORDING TO DR. LU, THE ACADEMY ESTABLISHED THE CENTER IN 1995, AND TASKED IT WITH UNDERTAKING BOTH RESEARCH AND TRAINING. THE CENTER'S FOURTEEN RESEARCH STAFFERS CURRENTLY INCLUDE EIGHT WITH DOCTORATES. NONE OF THEM IS A PRACTITIONER OF ANY MAJOR RELIGION, DR. LU ADMITTED, WHILE STRESSING THAT SOME OF THEM, LIKE MOST VIETNAMESE, HAVE "BELIEF" SYSTEMS SUCH AS ANCESTOR WORSHIP (WHICH HE STRESSED WAS NOT SUPERSTITIOUS). DR. LU CLAIMED THAT CPV POLICY DID NOT AT ALL PROHIBIT PARTY MEMBERS FROM BEING RELIGIOUS, BUT AGREED THAT RELIGIOUS CPV MEMBERS WERE "VERY FEW."

4. (U) DR. LU NOTED THAT CPV POLICY TOWARD RELIGION HAD BECOME MUCH MORE FAVORABLE IN 1990 WITH THE ISSUANCE OF
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 HANOI 01653 01 OF 02 011003Z
RESOLUTION 24, WHICH NOTED THAT RELIGION WAS A "LONG-STANDING PROBLEM" IN VIETNAM, ASSESSED THAT RELIGION COULD BE A "POSITIVE FORCE" IN BUILDING A "NEW SOCIETY," AND CONCLUDED THAT RELIGION WAS A "SPIRITUAL NEED" OF SOME VIETNAMESE CITIZENS. SINCE THAT TIME, CPV POLICY HAS BEEN TO "RESPECT" RELIGION AND TO UNDERTAKE APPROPRIATE "MEASURES" TO ENSURE THAT RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS HAD THE NECESSARY FREEDOM TO WORSHIP. DR. LU STRESSED THAT THE CPV'S POSITION WAS THAT -- "IF HANDLED WELL" -- RELIGION COULD BE GOOD FOR SOCIETY AND THE NATION.

5. (U) DR. LU CONFIRMED REPORTS THAT THE CPV WAS TINKERING WITH ITS POLICY ON RELIGION, BUT DECLINED TO PROVIDE ANY DETAILS. HE ADMITTED ONLY THAT THE UPDATED POLICY, WHICH WILL PROBABLY LEAD TO NEW REGULATIONS RATHER THAN A NEW LAW, WOULD BE "BETTER" AND "MORE CORRECT" THAN EXISTING LEGISLATION.

16. (U) WHILE NOT OFFERING TO SHARE COPIES OF ANY RECENT RESEARCH, DR. LU RELUCTANTLY DESCRIBED SOME RECENT TOPICS:
-- HO CHI MINH'S VIEWS ON RELIGION (GENERALLY FAVORABLE, DR. LU SAID);
-- COMPARATIVE BUDDHISM (I.E., BETWEEN VIETNAM AND OTHER NATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA);
-- PRACTICES OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN VIETNAM;
-- THE NEXUS BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND CULTURE IN VIETNAMESE HISTORY (HE NOTED THAT THIS LINK WAS NOWADAYS NOT VERY STRONG);
-- ORGANIZATION AND PRECEPTS OF THE SIX MAJOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN VIETNAM;
-- MARXIST/LENINIST ASSESSMENTS OF THE ROLE OF RELIGION;
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 HANOI 01653 01 OF 02 011003Z
-- THE "HUMANITARIAN VALUE" OF RELIGION;
-- RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF ETHNIC MINORITIES (DR. LU ADMITTED THAT THERE HAS BEEN VERY LITTLE DONE SO FAR ON THIS ISSUE, CLAIMING THAT SUCH RESEARCH WAS "DIFFICULT").

17. (U) MOST OF THE TRAINING GIVEN BY THE CENTER FOR STUDENTS (MID- TO SENIOR-LEVEL PARTY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS) WAS "PRETTY BASIC," DR. LU SAID. STAFF FROM THE CENTER USUALLY ONLY LECTURED AS PART OF OTHER, BROADER COURSES, RATHER THAN OFFERING SPECIALIZED COURSES OF STUDY. THEIR FOCUS IS ON EXPLAINING THE HISTORY OF CPV VIEWS ON RELIGION AND THE CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION OF RELIGIOUS POLICY. HE ADMITTED THAT IT WAS "VERY NECESSARY" FOR ALL CADRES TO HAVE A GOOD UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE "PROBLEM" OF RELIGION, AND THAT MANY DID NOT KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT CPV POLICY. (ONE BUDDHIST MONK AFFILIATED WITH THE CENTRAL BUDDHIST SANGHA IN HANOI PREVIOUSLY NOTED TO POL/C THAT HE IS OCCASIONALLY INVITED TO SPEAK TO STUDENTS AT THE ACADEMY ON THE HISTORY AND ROLE OF BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM; EMBASSY IS NOT CERTAIN IF OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS ALSO LECTURE OCCASIONALLY.)

18. (U) WHEN ASKED WHETHER HE AND HIS STAFF HAD EVER READ THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, DR. LU PULLED OUT A WELL MARKED-UP COPY IN

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ4050

PAGE 01 HANOI 01653 02 OF 02 011003Z
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	SAS-00	/005W					

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R 010946Z JUL 02
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
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INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 HANOI 001653

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VIETNAMESE. NOTING TIME LIMITATIONS, HE DECLINED TO GO INTO DETAIL. POL/C URGED HIM TO SHARE WITH EMBASSY HIS FEEDBACK, ESPECIALLY IF THERE ARE FACTUAL ERRORS IN OUR REPORT, AND DR. LU AGREED TO DO SO AFTER HE RETURNS FROM THE ACADEMY'S ANNUAL JULY HOLIDAYS.

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PAGE 02 HANOI 01653 02 OF 02 011003Z
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